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S E C R E T ROME 003463

SIPDIS

NOFORN

STATE FOR EUR/WE
ALSO FOR EUR, PM, AF, AF/W, AND EUR/RPM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/27/2013

TAGS: MOPS PREL IT FUN

SUBJECT: LIBERIA: SETAF SUPPORT FOR ECOWAS MISSION

REF: A. A) ROME 3399

1B. B) 7/25 TURNER-DWYER TELCON

1C. C) 7/29 DODSON-ROBBINS MEETING AT EMBASSY ROME

1D. D) 7/30 BIGO-ROBBINS TELCONS

Classified By: A/DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION JOHN DWYER FOR REASONS 1.5(B)(
D)

11. (U) THIS IS AN URGENT ACTION REQUEST. See para 6.

12. (SBU) Italian officials are supportive of US assistance for stabilization efforts in Liberia. As reported ref A, A/Pol Minister-Counselor met on July 24 with DG for Africa Cabras to secure Italy's lead in requesting EU funding for assistance to Liberia. Officials in the MFA, MOD, and the PM's office have tracked with great interest the USG's July 26 public announcement that the USG was activating a Joint Task Force (JTF) headquarters -- at a Southern European Task Force (SETAF) site near Vicenza, Italy -- to support an ECOWAS mission in Liberia. These officials and senior Italian uniformed officers have expressed keen interest in further details about JTF activities.

13. (S/NOFORN) We understand from discussions with US military personnel that the JTF HQ in Italy will have a maximum of about 400 US military personnel. Additionally, a small, forward-deployed JTF cell will be established on a US military vessel off of Liberia's coast. That cell would be comprised of 50-60 armed US military personnel who would flow from Italy via western Africa to the vessel. We also understand that both the JTF HQ and the forward-deployed JTF cell are for support purposes only; neither would provide command and control for the ECOWAS mission.

14. (S/NOFORN) Late-breaking information indicates that a handful of US military personnel could begin to flow out of Italy to staff the forward-deployed cell as early as this evening (July 30). The group would reportedly transfer (with personal arms) by bus from Vicenza to Aviano AFB, and then fly MILAIR to western Africa (NFI).

15. (S/NOFORN) COMMENT. As noted, the GOI is supportive of US efforts to stabilize Liberia. While movements of armed US troops from Italy into areas of conflict are always potentially sensitive, this should be a relatively easy case, if managed properly. GOI receptivity, already high because of the humanitarian nature of the mission, will be augmented by the fact that the US deployment from Italy is small, indirect (via a third country), and to a US vessel. Reported efforts to garner UNSC backing for the ECOWAS mission will also bolster GOI support. Indeed, the only potential negative we foresee at this point is surprising our friends in the GOI. Any perception that we failed to coordinate US military movements from Italy toward a zone of conflict could be used by the Berlusconi government's enemies to attack and weaken those most supportive of us. Timely consultations will remove that potential problem. END COMMENT.

16. (S/NOFORN) ACTION REQUEST. Post requests Department authorization soonest to approach appropriate GOI officials to provide details on the JTF and plans for the forward-deployed cell. Instructions along the lines of the following should suffice:

-- As you know, the USG is preparing support for an ECOWAS mission to stabilize Liberia.

-- Central to this effort was the recent creation of a Joint Task Force HQ at Lungari, near Vicenza.

-- We also plan to set up a small, forward-deployed JTF cell in the region. Plans call for the cell to operate initially from a US military vessel off the coast of Liberia.

-- In support of that cell, we foresee moving 50-60 US military personnel from Italy by MILAIR, via a third country(s).

-- The situation in Liberia is dynamic and fluid. Should

events on the ground require a substantial change in our plans as they relate to US forces in Italy, we will inform you at the earliest opportunity.

END ACTION REQUEST.

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